

Thinking Back

Submitted by JESSE ANDREW

At the age of 83, I sometimes think of all the modern things we have that makes life easier. At least they are supposed to make life easier. We have credit cards, televisions, airplanes, computers, refrigeration, air conditioning and more luxuries.

Sometimes, I catch myself thinking back to earlier days and reviewing some of the things we once had that we don't have now. Most of the time, I say, "Thank Goodness"! But I do have some pleasant memories of some of those things that have disappeared over the years.

COAL

Where would you go today to find a lump of coal? Coal was once readily available for use in stoves and furnaces. Every town had a coal yard. Greenwood had a couple. Along with the coal, we had cinders. These made excellent paving for running tracks. The bad memories include carrying in buckets of coal to place at the side of the stove. Then there was the task of removing the ashes from the stove each day. What a dirty mess that was!

THE ICE MAN

In the summers, there was the iceman. Before air conditioning, we had to keep our doors and windows open. We could hear the iceman coming. He had a gong or loud bell that he would sometimes ring as he came down the street.

We placed our ice cards in the window indicating how many pounds we wanted – 25, 50, 75, or 100. The ice was not weighed before it was brought to the house and during delivery some of the ice melted. If a person lived near the end of the route, they usually got a block of ice that was smaller than what was ordered.

CHICKENS AND CREAM

When was the last time you saw a live chicken roaming around a farmhouse or chicken yard? Most farmers had a flock of chickens. It was a common sight to see several chickens on the road in front of a farmhouse. If a person was driving too fast, it was likely that he would kill a chicken or two.

The Wadley Company was a large company that had small branches in many towns. They bought poultry from local farmers and sold them to town people for “eating” chickens.

The Wadley branches also served as cream stations. People skimmed the cream off of the milk each day and sold it at the cream station once a week. I remember my grandmother hoisting a five-gallon can of cream on her buggy and driving to town to sell it. She used the money to do her shopping. My mother did the same. Even though we only had one cow, Mom was able to collect a small bucket of cream to sell each week. The weekly 75 cents or a dollar went a long way towards putting food on the table. Many people in town had their own cow and chickens in a pen.

FACTORY WHISTLES

Many factory workers’ clocks were not reliable. Factories with steam boilers had steam whistles that were sounded each day at certain times. People depended on those whistles. The seven o’clock whistle was very common in some places. Then on Sundays there was the sound of church bells. It has been a long time since I have heard a church bell ring.

AUTOMOBILES

Many cars did not have starters. There was a crank in the front of the car that had to be turned to start the engine. If the car was an easy starter, it took only a flip or quarter turn of the crank to start the car. But this was not always the case. Sometimes, a person had to spin the crank. It took a pretty husky man to spin a crank, especially on the larger cars. Model T Fords had a spark lever. If the spark was not set right, the engine fired too soon and the result was called a kick. Many arms and wrists were broken as a result of those cantankerous vehicles.

A vacuum from the engine powered the windshield wipers. A small hose connected the engine and the windshield wipers. At a normal engine speed, the wipers ran at a steady speed. However, they tended to slow down or even stop as the engine accelerated. As the engine slowed down the wipers would speed up. That relationship was very sensitive.

Some of the older cars had headlights that operated on acetylene. A small acetylene tank was located on the running board and the operator used a match to light the flame. It burned with an intense bright light. Charged canisters of acetylene could be purchased at service stations. A company located in downtown Indianapolis

that sold acetylene canisters was Prest-O-Lite. The factory had a serious explosion and the owner moved and built a new factory. A town soon grew around the new factory and a racetrack was built. I am referring to Speedway, Indiana.

All cars were equipped with running boards. People stepped up into the car. Those running boards were handy places for a person to stand when the car was full of passengers. It was not too uncommon to see several men or boys hanging on each side of a car. Since most cars did not have trunks, some people purchased luggage carriers that they attached to the running boards. If the car was loaded with passengers the children often rode on top of the luggage.

Tail-lights on many cars were not electric, but actually small kerosene lights. These had to be lighted with a match before starting a night drive. At church, it was a common prank for some of the boys to turn the wick down so that it couldn't be lit. It was messy, fishing the wick out of the kerosene.

Time to purchase gasoline. You pulled up to a pump at a service station. The attendant pumped the gasoline into the pump reservoir that was a 10-gallon cylinder. The gasoline looked almost good enough to drink. Some of it was red, such as *Standard Red Crown* and *Blue Sunoco* was blue. There were other colors as well. Customers purchased gasoline by the gallon. The operator stopped the flow of gas after the pump level reached the requested gallon indicator.

STORES

In stores, a clerk always served a customer. When you went to a store, the clerk retrieved your items from the shelf. He put it on the counter and continued until your order was complete. Many items were sold in bulk. The clerk weighed the items, put them in a sack and tied the bag with a string. At home, we saved the string by rolling it into a ball. We always had a large ball of twine at our house. The stores were rather small. Not much room to walk around. There were no shopping carts. Those weren't available until 1936, or so. Vinegar was shipped in barrels. Bread was not wrapped, nor was it sliced. In hardware stores, nails arrived in kegs. Everything was packaged differently than it is today.

DELIVERY SERVICE

The milkman was an important person. A customer usually purchased the same amount of milk each day. The milkman left a bottle or two, as previously instructed. If the customer wanted to break the routine, a note was written to the milkman and

put into the top of an empty bottle. The milk box was usually kept on the porch and was insulated to keep the milk cold.

In some communities, there was an Omar man. He delivered breakfast rolls and other delicious baked goods.

Earlier in time, fish peddlers sometimes came around. If a man had good luck fishing, he put the fish on a wagon or in a car and went from door to door and sold fish.

The Raleigh man was a common visitor, especially in rural areas. He sold high quality extracts and other household items. He always gave a stick of chewing gum to each child he met. He had a route that he followed and came to the house three or four times a year.

THE BARBERSHOP

One of the real treats that some men looked forward to was going to the barbershop on Saturday for a shave, haircut, shampoo and tonic. Now, that was living high. The shelf behind the barber sometimes contained ten or fifteen bottles of hair tonic. After the haircut and shampoo, the barber thoroughly saturated the hair with a selected tonic. Then he placed a hot wet towel over the hair. He let this soak for a few minutes. The towel was removed and another application of tonic was applied. That wonderful aroma from the tonic was something to experience. After all this fine treatment, a man seemed to walk with a lighter step. He felt well groomed, ready to meet any obstacle. A man certainly would not go to a beauty shop.

THE TOWN WELL

Some small communities had a town well. We took our bucket to the well and got our supply of water. When driving along the road, it was not too uncommon to come to a spring where we could stop and get a drink of water. Many times, there would be a line of wagons with small tanks or other containers. The owners filled them up and headed for home.

HITCHING POSTS

Most towns had hitching posts that were used to tie up the horses that pulled buggies and wagons. It was a thrilling experience to go to town in the old farm wagon. It was commonly known as the “jolt wagon” because it had no springs.

There would be a few bales of hay for us to sit on. Upon our arrival, the horses were unhitched and tied to the side of the wagon so they could eat the hay.

In cold weather, we sat between the bales and covered ourselves with blankets. Most of the time, this happened on Saturdays, which were trading days.

Saturdays were busy days at the blacksmith shop. Often we would take the horses in to have them shod and drop off plow- shares to be sharpened.

U.S. 31

In 1940, when the people of Greenwood learned that the State Highway Commission was planning a four-lane by-pass around Greenwood, they hired a lawyer and fought the plans. “It’s a waste of money to build a road out in the country to by-pass Greenwood, when we have a perfectly adequate road, Madison Avenue.” The new road was built anyway and is now the six-lane U.S. 31. Today, it is almost always clogged with traffic. Then there is I-65 with a very busy six lanes of traffic. So much for forward thinking.

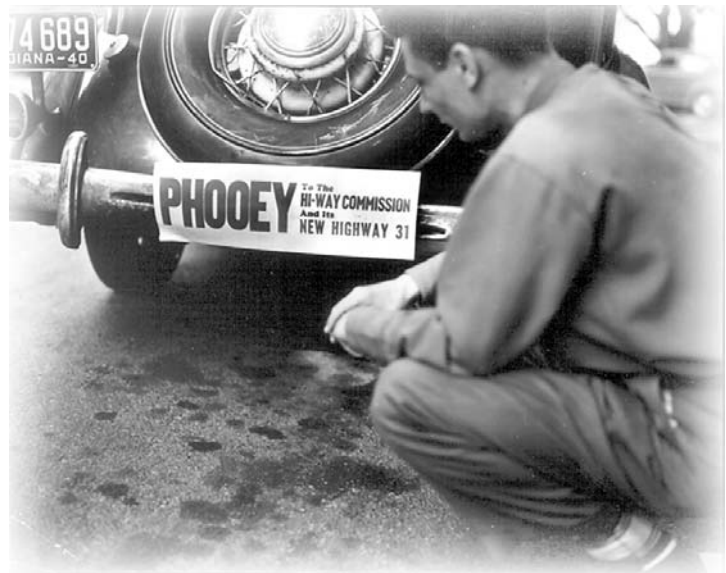


Photo courtesy of the Johnson County Museum.

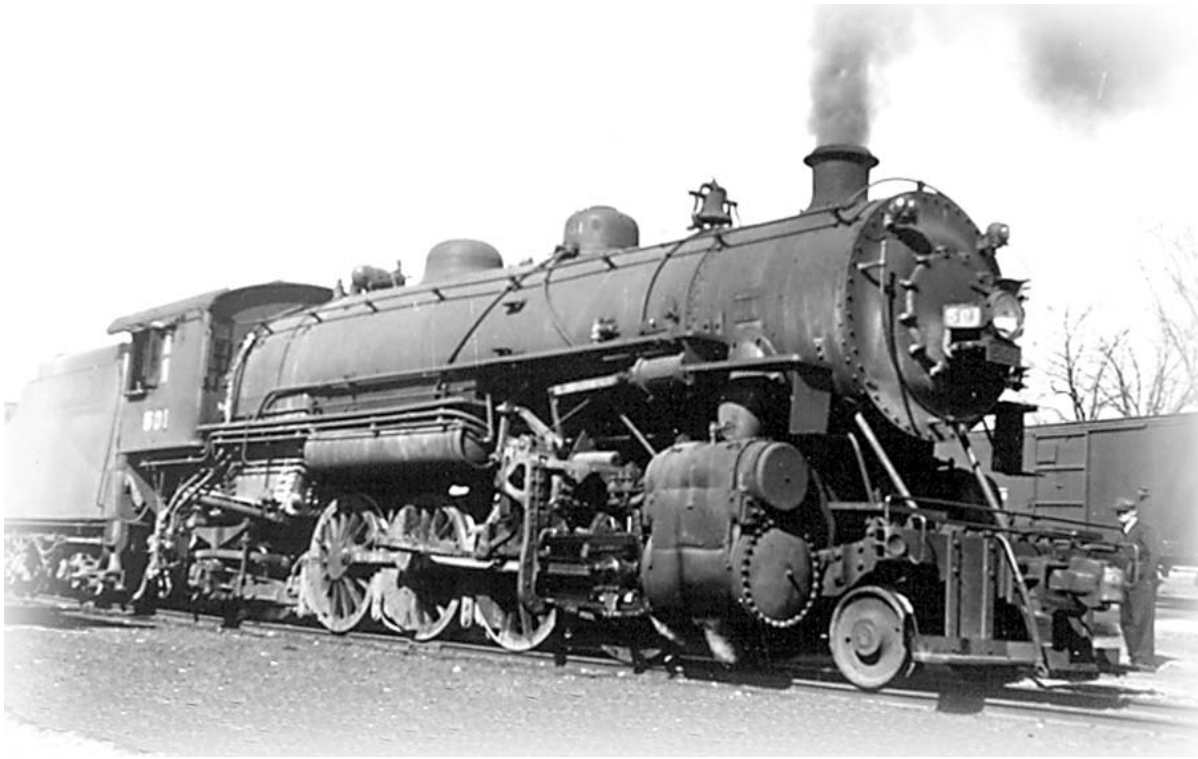
U.S. 31 Protest Sign

TRAINS

One of my big thrills was to be present when a train stopped. Before the train was in sight, the telegraph ticker seemed alive. There was anticipation and excitement in the air.

When the train arrived, the conductor helped people get off the train and the new passengers board. Many times this involved only two or three passengers. After the passengers had disembarked, the conductor stood facing the front of the train. He had his expensive railroad watch in hand with the lid open, anxious to get going.

The air pumps on the engine made a throbbing sound that made it seem alive and panting. The door of the mail car was thrown open and mailbags were ejected by an attendant wearing a gun belt with a loaded revolver in the holster. The express man



worked hard at getting the cartons and packages off of the train. As soon as the mailbags were off, he urged the ground man to get the new bags of mail onto the mail car.

The engineer sat in his cab, leaning out and looking back at his train, impatiently waiting for the mailmen and express men to finish their job. The feeling of urgency and excitement was contagious and a person felt a part of the action. The train departs and is out of sight. What a letdown. The local operator is sitting at the telegraph and sending a message to the dispatcher that the train has left his station. All of the people are gone. The station is quiet. You hang around a few minutes, trying to recapture the excitement. It does not return. You turn and start your journey to a different place.

Contributed by Jesse Andrew, September 14, 2001

IN MEMORY OF JESSE ANDREW

February 12, 1918 – March 5, 2003